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SUBJECT: BURMESE AND SHAN FORCES FIGHT IT OUT

REF: A. DEA RANGOON 96

- [1](#)B. DEA RANGOON 85
- [1](#)C. RANGOON 43
- [1](#)D. 05 RANGOON 639

Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: A recent GOB "news" conference announced the surrender of elements of the insurgent Shan State Army - South in northern Shan State. However, the GOB neglected to mention that the surrender followed a serious battle, in which a DEA source claims the Shan killed dozens of Burmese Army soldiers. The same source said that Burmese soldiers murdered Kachin members of a cease-fire group for failing to inform the GOB of the presence of the SSA-S forces in their area. Shan State groups are reportedly coordinating plans on how to counter the Burmese government if it forcibly tries to disarm cease-fire groups. END SUMMARY.

BACK IN THE LEGAL FOLD?

[1](#)2. (C) On January 17, the GOB held a press conference in Lashio, Shan State, to announce the surrender of Brigade 241 of the insurgent Shan State Army - South (SSA-S). During the past year several small, armed Shan units have "returned to the fold" in similar public ceremonies. Contrary to GOB spin, however, this latest surrender does not fit the usual pattern. These soldiers appear to be the remnants of an insurgent unit that the Burmese Army defeated in battle after cutting off their supplies, reinforcements, and escape routes.

DIFFERING VERSIONS OF THE STORY

[1](#)3. (C) Embassy sources report that the majority of the Shan State National Army (SSNA) moved south to merge with the SSA-S when one of its smaller factions surrendered to the GOB in May 2005 (ref D). According to a contact from a Shan cease-fire group, the SSA-S sent Brigade 241 to reassert

control of a former SSNA area near Nam Kham between September and November 2005. When the Burmese Northeastern Command belatedly learned that Brigade 241 was back in the area, it sent Burmese Army forces to attack the group. Serious fighting occurred during December 2005. According to the DEA source, as many as 70 Burmese soldiers may have died in the ensuing head-to-head battle (ref B).

¶4. (C) The GOB claims that Brigade 241 comprised around 56 soldiers of whom the Burmese Army captured 37, killed 4, and secured the surrender of the remaining 11, while 4 managed to escape. The Shan source claims that Brigade 241 consisted of many more soldiers and, with the help of former SSNA and Palaung State Liberation Army troops, most managed to escape the Burmese siege disguised as civilians. The source claims that no SSA-S soldiers surrendered, and the SSA-S "soldiers" that answered questions at the press briefing were not soldiers, but civilians dressed up in SSA-S uniforms.

¶5. (C) The Shan source also claimed that the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), a cease-fire group that controls much of Kachin State and some territory in northern Shan state, knew of the presence of the SSA-S forces in the Nam Kham area but withheld this information from the GOB. According to the DEA source, the Burmese Army retaliated by murdering five Kachin officials and KIA soldiers near Nam Kham (ref C).

SHANS DISCUSS OPPOSITION TO DISARMAMENT

¶6. (C) Another DEA source (ref A) claims that the SSA-S, SSNA, United Wa State Army, and the Myanmar National Defense Alliance Army (a Kokang cease-fire group) held a conference in the Wa capital, Pang Hsang, in October 2005. They discussed a collective response to the GOB's demands that the SSNA disarm and planned a coordinated defense strategy if the GOB tries to aggressively disarm cease-fire groups.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: The Burmese Army's victory over Brigade 241 came at an apparently high cost, but the Shan source's claims of 70 Burmese soldiers killed may be exaggerated, since we have seen no corresponding evidence elsewhere. Clearly, the other participants in the October discussions in Pang Hsang did not come to the SSA-S's rescue this time. Thus, it remains unclear what tripwire, if any, would cause the cease-fire groups to renew their armed conflict with the Burmese Army. Clashes like this one in Nam Kham could push the groups closer to that major decision. END COMMENT.
VILLAROSA